

*Draft*  
*Environmental Assessment*

**Brush Lake State Park  
Campground Project**



**October 2009**

Prepared by

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks



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## PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) proposed to initiate the development of a campground within Brush Lake State Park in northeastern Montana. The proposed new campground facilities would include approximate 17 campsites with electrical hookups, group use pavilion, vault latrines, informational kiosk, picnic shelter, access road, and dump station.

In its heyday during the 1920's, 30's and 40's, Brush Lake would attract thousands of enthusiastic visitors each year, from various communities of northeastern Montana and northwestern North Dakota. Besides the attraction of the clear, clean water of the lake, there were facilities for lodging, dining and dancing on the lake's perimeter. It was the place for relaxation and socializing in an outdoor setting. Through time, the buildings and infrastructure of that era were either accidentally burned or were taken down. In more recent times, the lake's water continues to attract users of motorboats, personal watercraft, sailboats, and canoes.

Due to the unique chemical make-up of the water, there are no fish in the lake. Therefore, the lake has the uncommon recreational setting of eliminating the possibility of conflicts between anglers and boat users. Much of the shoreline of Brush Lake is lined with fine sand, thus is a very popular body of water for people to swim, or simply to 'cool down' on a hot summer day. Uncomfortably hot ambient air temperatures are common in this part of Montana.

The majority of recreationists using Brush Lake come from the surrounding communities of Plentywood, Scobey and Culbertson, Montana, and Grenora and Williston, North Dakota. For most of these towns, Brush Lake is the closest body of water and in some cases, the only body of water where the local public can motorboat and partake in the types of recreation this lake offers. The majority of the visitation on the lake's shoreline was found in two locations, the north end and the south end.

On December 29, 2005, through approval of the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission and the Montana State Land Board, the MFWP Parks Division purchased approximately 450 acres of land and water at Brush Lake. The sole purpose of this purchase was to establish a water-based recreation state park. Approximately 58% of the total acreage of the State Park is land, with 42% lake and wetlands. Brush Lake itself is approximate 390 acres of water surface, all of which can be utilized for safe motorboat use. The acquired acreage generally covers land on the north, west and east shorelines, approximately 2/3rds of the lake's total shoreline.

During the summer of 2006, the initial facilities in establishing Brush Lake State Park were developed on the northeast portion of the lake's shoreline. Common recreational activities that are currently accommodated at this water-based park include motor boating, water skiing, personal water craft (PWC), sail boating and miscellaneous non-motorized boating, swimming, scuba diving, sunbathing, picnicking, bird watching, and natural resource and cultural interpretation. Specific recreational improvements that now exist include an upgraded entry/interior road, a defined gravel parking area, boat ramp and boat dock, a vault

latrine, designated swimming area, disable accessibility pathway, hiking trails and picnic tables & fire rings.

In preparation of the completion of the day-use facilities and to accommodate the influx of visitors, MFWP entered into a cooperative partnership with Sheridan County Commissioners in the fall of 2006 to upgrade/improve the existing road conditions of the county road leading to the park. These upgrades better facilitated the increase in vehicular traffic brought upon the initial improvements within the Park, and would manage the potential increase in traffic with the future campground. MFWP provided \$25,000 to this project, which was admirably orchestrated by the Sheridan County Road Department (*Sheridan County/MFWP Public Road Agreement – 3/27/06*). After the Park's day-use area was completed, the estimated visitation statistics for 2007 was 5,491, and for 2008, the actual count was 6,210.

Presently, this State Park is managed as a “day-use only” recreational area, overnight camping is not allowed. The existing day-use recreation site was not designed to include camping, and the terrain in and next to the day-use area cannot feasibly facilitate camping sites because of its slope and level of vegetation. Without a designated campground, primitive and dispersed camping has not been allowed anywhere within the park in order to protect the resources and to minimize enforcement costs.

Since the establishment of this State Park, there has been a public demand for the development of camping facilities. The Department has aspirations to purchase private property on the south end of Brush Lake, as level terrain on the south end would accommodate designated camping and an area for a large group use shelter/pavilion. Although there has been some communications between MFWP and the landowner, they are not willing to sell the south end of the lake to MFWP at this time.

In order to fill this void of camping in the Park and the surrounding area, MFWP proposes to develop a designated campground area on the northeast portion of State Park property, approximately 250 yards from the lake's east shoreline. (Map showing location and preliminary design of proposed campground, *Appendix A.*)

### **Proposed Facilities and Improvements**

- Interior gravel roadway: It is proposed to develop an access road into the campground that would tie-in all campsites, along with the possibility of a group use shelter/pavilion and other campground facilities. This new road would branch-off the Park's existing interior road. The entire campground road would be graveled, with a road surface of ¾ inch minus crushed gravel. Proper drainage would be provided in the design of the road in order to give integrity to the roadway and prevent costly upkeep.
- Individual campsites/pads: It is proposed to develop up to 17 individual campsites. Each campsite would provide a gravel camping pad, parking area, electrical hook-up, picnic table and fire ring. One campsite would be designed to facilitate disabled visitors and would meet ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) standards and the latrines would also meet ADA standards. There will also be up to four individual

campsites that will facilitate groups and multi-families. Specifically, these sites would provide camping areas for more than one camping unit, along with additional parking, additional electrical hook-ups and extra picnic tables.

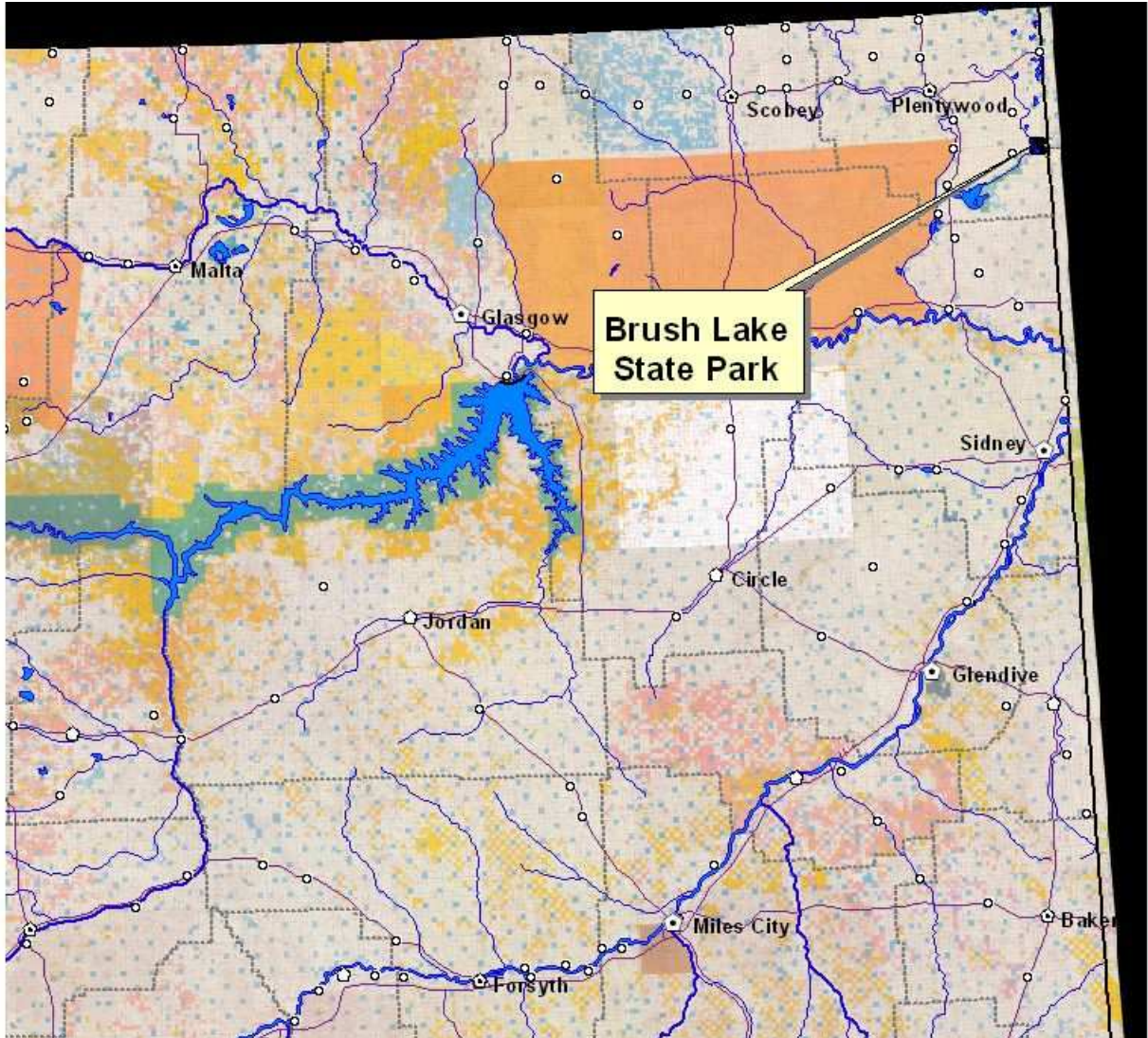
- Group-use shelter/pavilion: It is proposed to develop an open-sided group-use shelter that would be accessed by a cul-de-sac roadway within the campground. Dimensions of the shelter would be no larger than 20' x 50.' One side of the shelter would be closed, with three open sides. This concrete floored facility would provide electrical outlets, basic lighting fixtures, picnic tables; along with a water hydrant and fire rings located just outside of shelter. A parking area off of the cul-de-sac would provide approximately 20 parking places.
- Campground Host Pad: In addition to the individual campsites, it is proposed to provide one gravel campsite pad, located near the entrance the campground roadway that would facilitate the camping units and vehicles of the seasonal campground hosts. This host pad would have a water hydrant, electrical hook-ups, sewage system/drain field for black and gray water, an outdoor lighting fixture, telephone service, picnic table and fire ring. Next to this host pad would be a small storage building to be used for park maintenance supplies and equipment.
- RV dumpsite: It is proposed to develop a RV dump station that could receive and hold both gray and black water from recreational vehicles that are visiting the State Park. This station would be located near the campground host pad, thus would share the sewage system/drain field. This dump station would be on a gravel pullout pad, and would have water hydrants where potable water would be used for cleaning and the filling of the camping unit's cistern/water-holding tank.
- Vault latrines: For restroom facilities, it is proposed to provide a maximum of four pre-cast concrete vault toilets/latrines to be located throughout the campground area, including one next to the group-use shelter. Each latrine would be ADA compliant. The concrete vault would have a 1000-gallon capacity.
- Barriers: Barriers would be placed around the perimeter of portions of the individual campsites and parking areas, along with several locations along the interior campground roadway. The barriers are proposed in order to define campsites, parking areas and the interior roadway, while restricting off-road travel. Wood, rocks, and/or pre-cast concrete will be used for barrier materials.
- Entry station/kiosk, directional & regulatory signing: The pullout area is proposed near the entrance/exit of the campground roadway would accommodate a self-pay fee station (commonly called an "iron ranger"), along with an information kiosk. Regulatory, directional and information signs would be installed throughout the campground area.
- Picnic shelter/lean-to for Day-Use Area: In addition to the proposed improvements for the designated campground, it is also proposed to erect a maximum of three small picnic shelters that would cover some of the picnic tables located in the existing Day-Use Area of the park. These shelters would protect the users from some of the sunlight, moisture and wind.
- Well for a source of water within the campground: For the convenience of campground users, MFWP would drill a well within Brush Lake State Park as a source for potable water for visitors and possible fire suppression efforts.

### **Legal Descriptions and Locations of Properties**

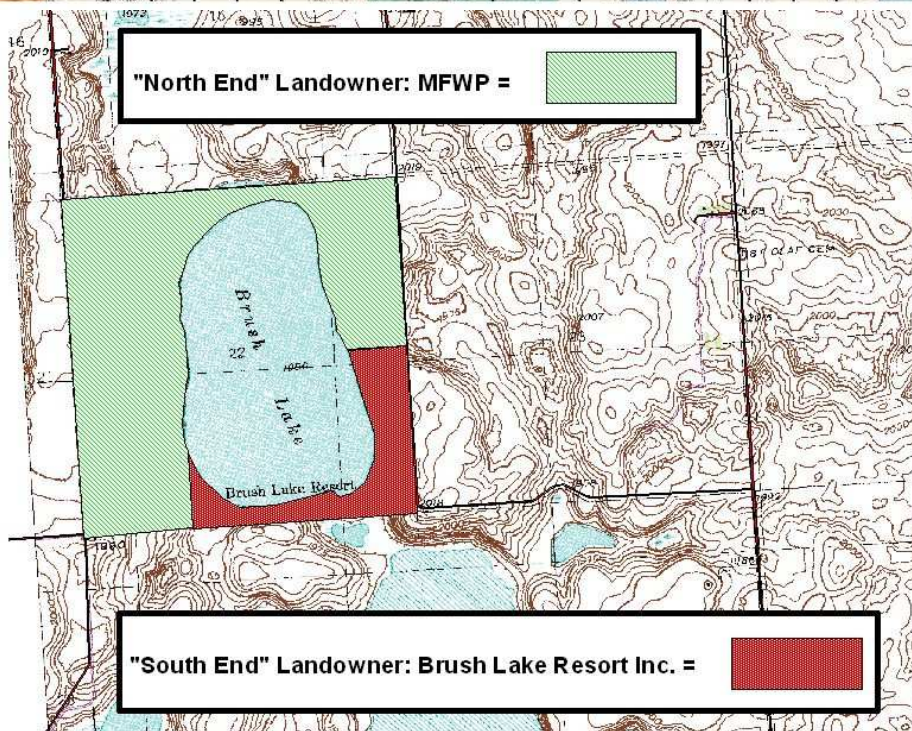
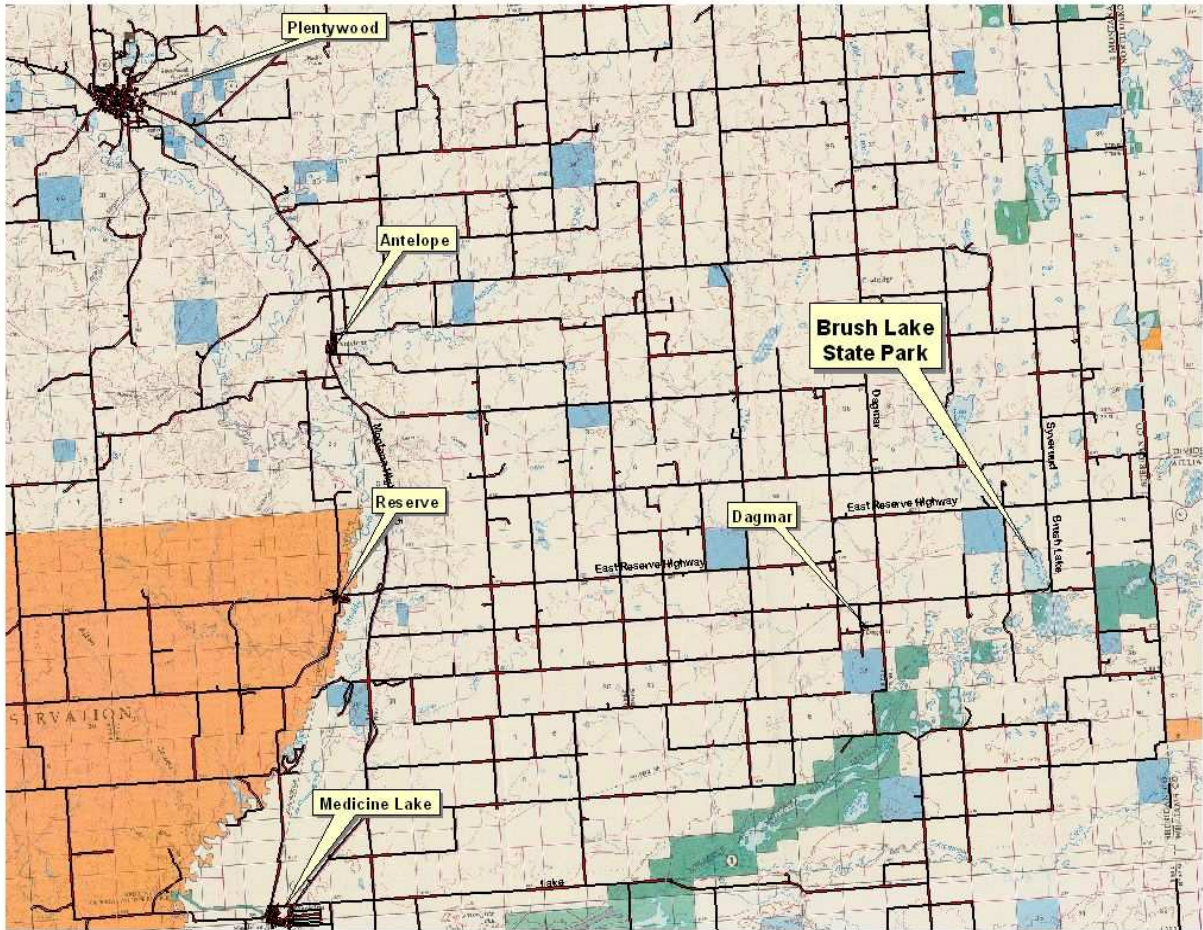
Approximately 31 road miles southeast of Plentywood, MT, and 5 miles east of Dagmar, MT.

Legal Description: Sheridan County, Montana

Township 33 North, Range 58 East, Section 22 (NE ¼)







## **AUTHORITY AND REGULATIONS**

### **1. MFWP**

MFWP has the authority to provide development for public recreation on department lands (23-1-102, MCA). During the 2003 Montana State Legislative session, a Senate Resolution (SJR 15) was passed which directed MFWP to make Brush Lake the first State Park in northeastern Montana. The 2009 State Legislature provided spending authority to MFWP to pursue this project.

The proposed action constitutes a state action subject to the Montana Environmental Policy Act and other applicable state statutes. MFWP is required to analyze the impacts under these requirements.

### **2. U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE**

The proposed new development of the facilities at Brush Lake State Park will use funds from the Wallop Breaux Program and such, will constitute a federal action subject to the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended. USFWS is therefore required to prepare an environmental assessment to analyze the effects on the human environment and document the findings. USFWS will use this environmental assessment to determine if the proposed action is likely to result in significant impacts to the human environment. If it is determined that there are no significant adverse impacts, USFWS will issue a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). If it is determined, conversely, that significant impacts might occur, the Service would be required to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

## **ALTERNATIVES**

### **1. ALTERNATIVE A: PROPOSED ACTION**

#### **MFWP does embark upon the proposed campground improvements at Brush Lake State Park**

With the implementation of Alternative A, the recreational camping needs of the public would be addressed. Currently, visitors to the Park safely take part in several recreational activities, including but not limited to, motorized boating, picnicking, swimming, nature viewing, hiking, historical/cultural education, and natural resource education. With the establishment of a designated campground within this water-based State Park, summer visitors can extend their stay and take full advantage of these recreational activities.

It is also foreseen that this proposed campground would receive some use during the hunting and summer seasons due to the close proximity of the US Fish and Wildlife Service's Medicine Lake Wildlife Refuge and the several MFWP Block Management (hunting) Areas located within a 15-mile radius of Brush Lake State Park.

Depending upon the final costs of the development elements, portions of the proposed facilities may have to be postponed until additional funding becomes available (i.e., group use shelter).



## 2. ALTERNATIVE B: NO ACTION

### **MFWP does not provide proposed campground improvements at Brush Lake State Park**

With this alternative, the existing situation would continue of “Day-Use only” at this State Park. It is presumed that the written and verbal requests from the public for overnight camping facility improvements would continue.

## **AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT**

### **1. PHYSICAL RESOURCES**

#### **A. Land Use**

Since MFWP’s acquisition of the property in 2005, the designated location for the proposed campground has been maintained as open space grasslands. Historically, the acreage had been use for the cultivation of dry-land crops.

Until September 30, 2007, 246 acres of this Park was under the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), which promotes the reduction of soil erosion, protection of water resources, and enhancement of wildlife habitat and wetlands. Upon the termination of the CRP agreement held by past landowner, MFWP did not continue to manage this acreage under this federal program. The proposed project is located on a portion of this ‘past’ CRP land.

#### **B. Soil and Prime/Unique Farmland**

Brush Lake State Park is in a region of Montana where a glaciated landscape exists with numerous shallow, prairie potholes dotting the area.

A search of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Soil Survey database found the following soil types within the area of the proposed campground and no portion of the area is designated Prime or Unique Farmland.

Farmland Classification— Summary by Map Unit — Sheridan County, Montana				
Map unit symbol	Map unit name	Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
PaB	Parshall fine sandy loam, 2 to 6 percent slopes	Farmland of statewide importance	0.2	4.9%
WaE	Wabek gravelly sandy loam, 0 to 35 percent slopes	Not prime farmland	4.8	95.1%
<b>Totals for Area of Interest</b>			<b>5.0</b>	<b>100.0%</b>



Map courtesy of the NRCS Web Soil Survey database.

#### C. Air Quality

The portion of Brush Lake State Park targeted for the proposed campground is currently open grasslands and no activities occur on the property that currently affect air quality.

#### D. Water Resources

Brush Lake State Park is located adjacent to the 280-acre Brush Lake in northeastern Montana. This spring fed lake stays cool in the summer and is 60' deep in places. There is no inlet or outlet from the lake, so water leaves either through evaporation or by seeping into nearby White Lake. High levels of manganese, calcium carbonate, and sodium sulfate are left in the water from evaporation.

#### E. Noise

The location of this park in Montana's northeastern prairie provides visitors with a quiet experience with few man-made noises. Only noise generated from watercraft on the lake changes the ambient sound levels.

## 2. BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

#### A. Vegetation

Location for the proposed campground within Brush Lake State Park was used to cultivate dry-land crops and was part of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) until the property was acquired by MFWP. Introduced grasses such as smooth brome (*Brome inermis*), crested wheatgrass (*Agropyron desertorum*), pigeon grass (*Setaria glauca*), tall wheat grass (*Thinopyrum ponticum*), and Kentucky blue grass (*Poa pratensis*) dominate the site.

The only plant species listed as sensitive species in area by the Montana Heritage database is the silky prairie clover (*Dalea villosa*).

## B. Wildlife

### Endangered, Threatened, or Candidate and State Sensitive Species

The Listed Endangered, Threatened, Proposed, and Candidate Species in Sheridan County as determined by the Montana Ecological Services Field Office are as follows:

Scientific Name	Common Name	Designation
<i>Charadrius melodus</i>	Piping Plover	LT, CH
<i>Grus americana</i>	Whooping Crane	LE

State Sensitive Species known to occur in within T33N, R58E (the location of Brush Lake State Park) are as follows:

Group	Scientific Name	Common Name	State Rank
Birds	<i>Ammodramus bairdii</i>	Baird's Sparrow	S3B
	<i>Ammodramus leconteii</i>	Le Conte's Sparrow	S3B
	<i>Ammodramus nelsoni</i>	Nelson's Sparrow	S3B
	<i>Ammodramus savannarum</i>	Grasshopper Sparrow	S3B
	<i>Anthus spragueii</i>	Sprague's Pipit	S3B
	<i>Athene cunicularia</i>	Burrowing Owl	S3B
	<i>Calcarius ornatus</i>	Chestnut-colored Longspur	S2B
	<i>Charadrius melodus</i>	Pipping Plover	S2B
	<i>Coturnicops noveboracensis</i>	Yellow Rail	S3B
	<i>Dolichonyx oryzivorus</i>	Bobolink	S3B
	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	Caspian Tern	S2B
	<i>Leucophaeus pipixcan</i>	Franklin's Gull	S3B
	<i>Numenius americanus</i>	Long-billed Curlew	S3B
	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	Black-crowned Night Heron	S3B
	<i>Pelecanus erythrorhynchos</i>	American White Pelican	S3B
	<i>Sterna forsteri</i>	Forster's Tern	S3B
	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	Common Tern	S3B
Reptiles	<i>Opheodrys vernalis</i>	Smooth Greensnake	S2
Amphibians	<i>Rana pipiens</i>	Northern Leopard Frog	S1

## C. Fisheries

There are no fish species associated with the property because Brush Lake is sterile due to high levels of minerals in the water.

## 3. **SOCIO-ECONOMIC RESOURCES**

### A. Community

Brush Lake State Park is located in a very rural region, where large dryland crops, mainly wheat, are cultivated and sheep and cattle graze on ranchland. The largest town in the area is Plentywood with a population of nearly 1,700 in 2008 and there are numerous smaller communities sprinkled across the prairie such as Dagmar, Froid, Reserve, and Culbertson.

B. Taxes and Public Services

Per state statute 87-1-603, MFWP does not pay Sheridan County property taxes for Brush Lake State Park. MFWP is responsible to contact County officials when installing septic systems or changes to utilities, property subdivisions, and coordinating emergency responses.

C. Historical and Cultural

An archaeological survey was completed when the property was purchased that reported the area likely had constant use for more than 10,000 years, probably by ancestors of present-day American Indians, specifically the Assiniboiné tribe. In 1883, the U.S. Government opened the original Assiniboiné territory to white settlers after the disappearance of buffalo from the prairie landscape, which affected the traditional lifestyle of the Tribe. The current boundaries of the Fort Peck Reservation, where the Assiniboiné and Dakota Sioux now live, was drawn in 1886.

After the opening of the area to homesteading, settlers began to flock to Brush Lake because it was the only freshwater lake in the area. As previously noted, by the early half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Brush Lake became a destination location for recreation festivities, with a compound of buildings being established on the southern rim of the lake for dining, dancing, lodging, and other fun. The location of those buildings and their successors are not within MFWP's property boundary.

D. Aesthetics and Recreation

The lake is located within a depression in the prairie, which provides it with some shelter from the winds that strafe the surrounding ridges. Once above the edge of the depression's rim, the viewshed is an unimpaired expanse of the nearby wheat fields and grassland prairie.

Because of Brush Lake's unique geology and source of water, the lake continues to be a popular destination for both northeast Montanans and western North Dakotans for water-based recreation. Although there is no fishing, boating and swimming are common activities in the cool water, especially during the hot summers.

## **PREDICTED ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES**

### **1. LAND USE**

A. Proposed Action Alternative

By developing an interior graveled roadway for access into and through the proposed campground, the disposition of portions of the existing terrain would take place. The topography of the proposed development site is relatively level, with one slight drainage pattern which runs towards the east shoreline of Brush Lake. This dry, small ravine is heavily covered with vegetation. FWP would install proper silt fencing structures before construction to decrease the potential for any new erosion patterns for becoming established, and the fencing would remain in after completion.



B. No Action Alternative

Management of the lands at the Brush Lake State Park would not change from current practices with this alternative. The park would continue to be open for day-use terrestrial and water-based public recreation activities. The area that was considered for the campground would remain as open space and would likely be subject to pedestrian traffic.

## **2. SOILS AND PRIME/UNIQUE FARMLAND**

A. Proposed Action Alternative

Regional MFWP Parks Mgr., Woody Baxter contacted Tim Solberg (406-765-1550) Soils Scientist with the Natural Resources and Conservation Service (NRCS) office in Plentywood, MT in order to determine the soils types and the designation of prime or unique agricultural lands in the described area. Solberg described the soils around the perimeter of Brush Lake are all “Waebeck soils,” which are pure gravel knobs. Whereas, the northeast portion of the described property is a fine loam sandy soil, the northwest portion is a course sandy soil.

Solberg further explained that there are “no designated prime or unique farmlands” in Sheridan County, therefore the proposed improvements would not affect any prime or unique agricultural lands. (Conversation between Baxter and Solberg took place 11/2/04.)

B. No Action Alternative

If this alternative were approved, there would be no changes to soil or old farmland conditions at this state park. There are no designated unique or prime farmlands within the park’s boundary.

## **3. AIR QUALITY**

A. Proposed Action Alternative

Both the construction and the final product of this project would possibly result in minimal changes to the ambient air quality because of the higher degree of use of the site by the public. These incremental changes would not conflict with federal or state air quality regulations. If dust within the campground from vehicle movements became a public health nuisance or a public safety issue (visibility), MFWP would likely implement a dust abatement technique to reduce the particulate in the air.

B. No Action Alternative

If this alternative were approved, MFWP expects there would be no changes to the ambient air quality at the location.

## **4. WATER RESOURCES**

A. Proposed Action Alternative

By developing an interior graveled roadway for access into and through the proposed campground, the disposition of portions of the existing terrain would take place that could potentially affect existing drainage patterns. The topography of the proposed development site is relatively level and the small ravine adjacent to the road’s route is heavily covered with

vegetation. In order to decrease the chance that runoff from the proposed road drained to the lake, FWP would install silt fencing before construction, which would remain in place for a season or two after completion.

One of the proposed campground elements is the drilling of a new water well that will be available for visitor consumption and if needed, fire suppression. The exact location and depth of the new well is not known at this time. A nearby well used for domestic water registered at the Brush Lake Resort is reported to have a depth of 100 feet. MFWP anticipates their new well will require the same depth to ensure a consistent gallons/minute pump rate even during the summer for its visitors to use. The new well is not expected to influence the water level or water quality of Brush Lake since the lake is directly fed by an individual spring.

The Sheridan County Sanitarian has presented MFWP with State requirements for the installation of vault latrines. Prior to the installation of the vault latrines, MFWP would acquire a permit from the County and Montana Department of Environmental Quality.

Other than Brush Lake, the park does not have any other water features with the exception of a wetland easement ¼ mile south of the proposed campground. There is a perpetual wetland easement with the US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) within the deeded state park property. The purpose of this approximate 14-acre wetland easement is to protect the area from being drained, filled or leveled. This wetland is located on the far north end of the Park's property. This project is not in a designated floodplain, nor would it affect a designated floodplain (Sheridan County Planner – 7/6/09)

This project would not result in any discharge that would conflict with federal or state water quality regulations.

#### B. No Action Alternative

The implementation of this alternative would have no affect on the existing drainage patterns or access to Brush Lake.

### 5. NOISE

#### A. Proposed Action Alternative

There is likely to be a temporary increase in noise levels during construction phase of the proposed project caused by heavy equipment such as dump trucks, backhoes, graders, and potential well-drilling equipment. The increase in noise levels would be temporary in nature and would cease at the conclusion of the construction phase.

With the proposed installation of electrical hook-ups at each campsite and electrical outlets at the group-use shelter, there will be limited or no need for personal generators. Therefore, it is anticipated that noise levels within the proposed campground would be minimal.

In response to potential increased noise levels produced by motorized watercraft from park users, MFWP staff has the ability to monitor decibel levels. In turn, boaters would be restricted to maintain engine noise levels at or below state required standards or below.

B. No Action Alternative

Current noise levels at all the parcels would not be expected to change if the No Action Alternative were implemented because no new activities would be anticipated at the park.

## 6. VEGETATION

A. Proposed Action Alternative

The proposed campground facilities will require the removal and disturbances to local vegetative cover. In some areas, existing tame grasses will be covered over by gravel; in other locations, the grasses will be removed with adjoining soil for the placement of the water well and vault latrine. Even with these impacts, the diversity of vegetation within the park will not change and there will still be areas of uninfluenced tame grasses on the western side of the lake for visitors to explore.

Activities such as soil disturbance during improvement construction and vehicular traffic tends to lead to the establishment and spread of noxious weeds. With the guidance of *MFWP Statewide Integrated Noxious Weed Management Plan – June 2008*, weed control efforts (chemical, mechanical and biological) would be put in place by MFWP, and coordinated with the Sheridan County Weed Control Supervisor.

As with other MFWP sites, invasive species information/awareness signing would be posted in the campground. These signs educate visitors of the current problematic invasive species of Eurasian watermilfoil and purple loosestrife in water bodies and knapweed on the prairie. Both visual images and descriptions are provided on MFWP signage, along with preventive steps the boaters and campers can take to minimize introductions.

The state park was visited and inspected for the presence of wetlands in May of 2005 by Michael Rabenberg, USFWS Deputy Project Manager at Medicine Lake National Wildlife Refuge Complex (Medicine Lake, MT). The proposed project site is not defined as wetlands.

B. No Action Alternative

Management of the Brush Lake State Park would continue to focus on providing public access to the lake and as a location for recreational activities. Public usage of the site may disturb some vegetation, but MFWP will seek to limit negative impacts through educational signage. MFWP would carry on with current operations to control noxious weeds on the property.

## 7. WILDLIFE

A. Proposed Action Alternative

MFWP Wildlife Biologist, Scott Thompson, found no potential impact to wildlife species with implementation of the proposed project. Because the parcel is currently tame grass (old

CRP), impacts will be largely limited to grassland nesting birds. There would be avoidance of the campground area from a nesting/brood-rearing standpoint by most bird species. This is due to fragmenting the block of cover. Thompson predicted that there would be some dispersion of wildlife that may normally use the area, but not to the point of impacting or putting stress on wildlife populations. If the trees/shrubs should repopulate the campground area, they would be an attraction for resident and migratory game and non-game species. (Scott Thompson, MFWP, Culbertson, MT, 7/22/09)

MFWP regional staff contacted Mark Wilson, USFWS Ecological Services, in reference to Threatened & Endangered (T&E) species concerns. Wilson stated that based upon the boundaries of the state park it is not believed that improvements would cause any significant adverse impacts to fish, wildlife, or habitats under the purview or management jurisdiction of the USFWS. (Mark Wilson, USFWS, Ecological Services, Helena, MT, 9/1/05.)

The following are mitigation measures MFWP plans to use to minimize dispersion of wildlife or adverse impacts to wildlife and habitats caused by the presence of park visitors:

- Specific recreational facilities which could concentrate recreational use, such as campsite pads, vehicle parking, picnic tables, group-use shelter and latrines would be located in areas less likely to impact local mammal migration routes and always from optimum bird nesting sites.
- Education/interpretative signing would be posted to inform park visitors of wildlife species in the area and their behavior.
- The state park's pet leash regulation would be strictly enforced.
- Upon any indication that T&E species are frequenting or nesting within the park, immediate and continuous correspondence would be initiated with local USFWS officials from the Medicine Lake National Wildlife Refuge Complex. Upon evaluation of the sensitivity of the situation, an interagency management action would be engaged to minimize human contact or disturbances to the species.
- As with other MFWP sites, invasive species information/awareness signing would be posted within the campground. These signs educate boaters of the current problems associated with zebra mussels. Both a visual image and description is provided, along with preventive steps the boater can take to minimize introductions.

The proposed project would not introduce or export any species not presently or historically occurring in the receiving area.

#### B. No Action Alternative

If this alternative were chosen, MFWP expects there would be no changes in the diversity and density of resident wildlife at the park and that transient wildlife would continue to move through the site when needed.

### **8. FISHERIES**

No impacts are expected since there are no fish species associated with the property, regardless of whether the Proposed Alternative or No Action Alternative was implemented.



## **9. COMMUNITY**

### **A. Proposed Action Alternative**

Brush Lake has traditionally been a relatively high motorboat use area during the summer months, even before becoming a state park in 2005. With the establishment of the day-use area in 2006, and now the proposed campground within the state park, it is expected that visitation numbers in the area would increase. To prepare for this influx, in 2006 MFWP formed a cooperative partnership with Sheridan County Commissioners who upgraded/improved the existing road conditions of the county roads leading to the park. These upgrades better facilitate the increase in vehicular traffic brought on by the initial improvements within the Park, and would accommodate the potential increase in traffic with the proposed campground (*Sheridan County/MFWP Public Road Agreement – 3/27/06*).

There is only one campground (public or private) within a 25-mile radius of the park. It is small private campground located in Medicine Lake. There are two additional private campgrounds in Plentywood, 30 miles northwest and one private campground in Culbertson, 50 miles southwest of Brush Lake. The establishment of a new public campground by MFWP is not expected to affect any of those other campgrounds.

In 2005, University of Montana's Institute of Tourism and Recreation Research conducted a survey of traveler characteristics for non-resident travelers for the Missouri River Country, which is included Sheridan County. The survey reported that a higher percentage of the respondents stayed overnight in public campgrounds versus private ones during their visit.

### **B. No Action Alternative**

There would be no changes to community resources or local businesses if this alternative were approved.

## **10. TAXES AND PUBLIC SERVICES**

### **A. Proposed Action Alternative**

Upon completion of the proposed project, it is understandable that disposal of solid waste would be required at higher levels than what currently occur within the day-use area. It is planned to continue and upgrade the waste disposal services provided by the private company currently contracted with MFWP.

Presently, periodic patrolling is conducted within the State Park, especially during the summer months, from the staff of the Sheridan County Sheriff's office and the MFWP Fish, Wildlife & Parks wardens. With the presence of overnight use within the proposed campground, it is planned that MFWP would continue to rely on assistance from the Sheridan County Sheriff's office.

Brush Lake has traditionally received relatively high motorboat use during the summer months, even before MFWP ownership in 2005. With the establishment of the day-use area in 2006, and now the proposed campground within the state park, it is expected that visitation numbers in the area would increase. To prepare for this influx, in 2006 MFWP entered into a

cooperative partnership with the Sheridan County Commission who upgraded/improved the existing road conditions of the county road leading to the park. These upgrades better facilitate the increase in vehicular traffic brought on by the initial improvements within the Park, and would accommodate the potential increase in traffic from the proposed campground (*Sheridan County/MFWP Public Road Agreement – 3/27/06*).

The proposal for electrical improvements and the need for telephone service would require the addition of a power line onto the state park property. The nearest power pole is approximately .75 miles from the proposed campground area. MFWP would work directly with Montana-Dakota Utilities to establish electrical service within the park. As with other Montana state parks, MFWP would require all power lines and individual conduits for the campsite hook-ups to be installed underground to maintain the open viewshed of the park.

By developing the proposed campground and group use shelter, MFWP would have the ability to generate revenue through campground user fees (\$20/campsite/night) and through special use/group use permits for utilization of the group-use shelter. Revenue generated from park fees will be placed in the Parks Division's earned revenue account to support statewide parks projects and programs.

Additional maintenance/operation costs to the State Park with the proposed campground are projected at \$4,500 annually.

**B. No Action Alternative**

This alternative would not change the tax liability of MFWP for its property to Sheridan County. There would be no effects to the county tax base if this alternative were chosen.

## **11. HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES**

**A. Proposed Action Alternative**

A privately contracted cultural inventory was completed in 2005 (Cultural Resource Management Report - Brush Lake State Park - Gar C. Wood and Associates, Archaeological Consultants - Loma, MT - November 30, 2005). The results of the inventory/survey were sent to the State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO). One site was noted to have some cultural value. This site is south of the location of the proposed campground development. To ensure no sensitive sites are within the proposed campground, MFWP's Heritage Resources Program Manager will conduct a cultural resource survey prior to implementation of the proposed development and will consult with the State Historic Preservation Office as necessary. If any previously unrecorded cultural resource sites are discovered during construction, the Heritage Resource Program Manager will work with project engineers and the park manager to develop a project design that avoids further disturbance to these sites.

**B. No Action Alternative**

No historic or cultural resources would be disturbed if the No Action Alternative were implemented because MFWP would not initiate any new groundbreaking activities, and would maintain the current groundcover for the benefit of wildlife and protection of any unknown sensitive sites.

## **12. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION**

### **A. Proposed Action Alternative**

The quality and quantity of the recreation/tourism at this site would be altered. Both would be positively impacted due to the proposed improvements, allowing a greater number of visitors to stay longer in order to participate in the numerous recreational activities found within the State Park and the surrounding area. As required by MEPA & MCA 23-1-100, a Tourism Report from the Montana office of Tourism-Department of Commerce has been written (see Appendix E).

There are no Wild & Scenic Rivers, Trails or Wilderness Areas in the area, therefore no impacts.

### **B. No Action Alternative**

Management of the lands at the Brush Lake State park would not change from current practices with this alternative. The Park would continue to be open for day-use recreation activities. The open space and viewshed would remain intact.

## **CUMULATIVE IMPACTS**

If completed, the proposed development of a campground at Brush Lake State Park will visually alter some of the existing physical attributes of the site in order to expand the recreational opportunities offered to the public. The construction and installation of the proposed campground and access road requires the movement of soils and vegetative cover in the immediate area, which is a site that has been historically subjected to agricultural activities. Cumulative effects to these resources is anticipated to be moderate but are not expected to affected the overall diversity of plant or wildlife species within the park and the surrounding area. All the proposed improvements could be removed and their effects reversed if ever MFWP decided to close the facilities.

Since the actual increase in the level of usage of the campground by the public is unknown, potential cumulative effects to resources within the park and local area are difficult to completely predict or analyze in this assessment. However, it is likely overnight camping may give rise to the exploration of the entire shoreline of Brush Lake by visitors, which could pose usage-neighbor conflicts if trespassing became a problem. If that were to occur, MFWP would take a proactive approach to defuse the problem in order to meet the requirements and expectations of Montana's Good Neighbor Statute (23-1-126 MCA).

## **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

The public will be notified in the following manners to comment on this current EA, the proposed action and alternatives:

- Two public notices in each of these papers: *Wolf Point Herald-News*, *Sidney Herald-Leader*, *Daniels County Leader*, and *Sheridan County News*;
- A statewide new release;
- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: <http://fwp.mt.gov>; and
- Copies of this environmental assessment will be distributed to the neighboring landowners and interested parties to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project.

If requested, a public meeting would be scheduled by MFWP to coincide with the public comment period for the EA. Information identifying the specific date, time, and venue will be advertised within local papers and posted on the MFWP website as it becomes available.

The public comment period for state purposes will extend for (30) thirty days from the date when the assessment is published by the MFWP website. Written comments to this Draft Environmental Assessment will be accepted until December 18, 2009 and can be sent to the following:

Brush Lake State Park Campground Project  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
54078 US Hwy 2 West  
Glasgow, MT 59230  
Or email to [gwbaxter@mt.gov](mailto:gwbaxter@mt.gov)

## **EA PREPARATION**

Woody Baxter  
Parks Manager  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
54078 US Hwy 2 W, Glasgow, MT 59230  
[gwbaxter@mt.gov](mailto:gwbaxter@mt.gov) 406-228-3707

Rebecca Cooper  
MEPA Coordinator  
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks  
1420 East 6<sup>th</sup> Ave., Helena MT 59601  
[rcooper@mt.gov](mailto:rcooper@mt.gov) 406-444-4756

## **Resources or Organizations used in the preparation of the EA**

McKean, Andrew. "Oasis on the Prairie." *Montana Outdoors*. September – October 2005.

- Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) – Glasgow, Culbertson, and Helena, MT
- Montana Dept. of Transportation (MDT) – Wolf Point, MT
- Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) – Helena, MT
- Sheridan County Sanitarian – Plentywood, MT
- Natural Resources and Conservation Service (NRCS) - Plentywood, MT
- Sheridan County Planner – Plentywood, MT
- Sheridan County Commission – Plentywood, MT
- Sheridan County Sheriff's Office – Plentywood, MT
- University of Montana, Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research – Missoula, MT
- US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) – Ecological Services, Helena, MT



- US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) – Medicine Lake Wildlife Refuge, Medicine Lake, MT

**Appendices**

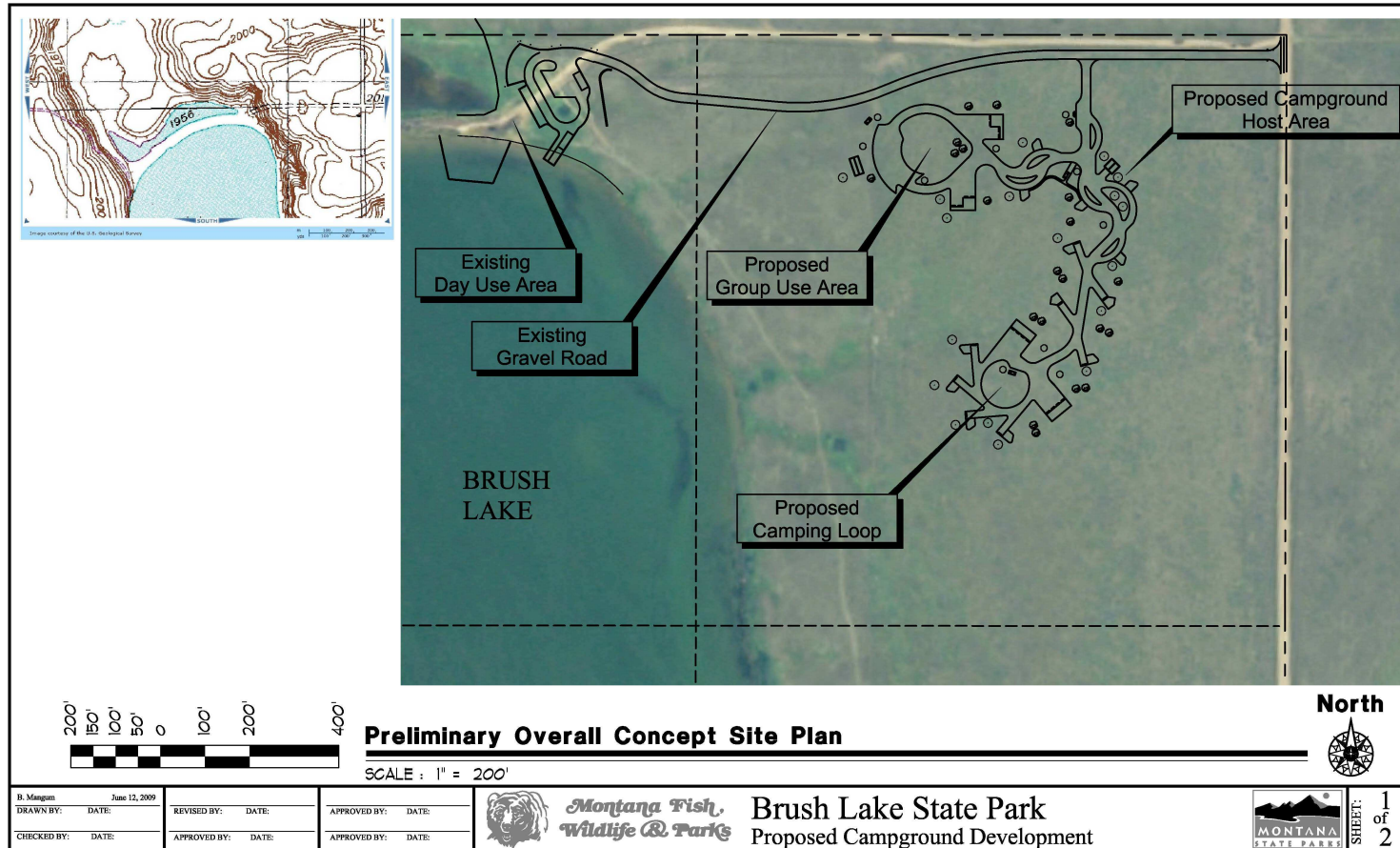
A – Brush Lake State Park Site Map and Preliminary Campground Plan

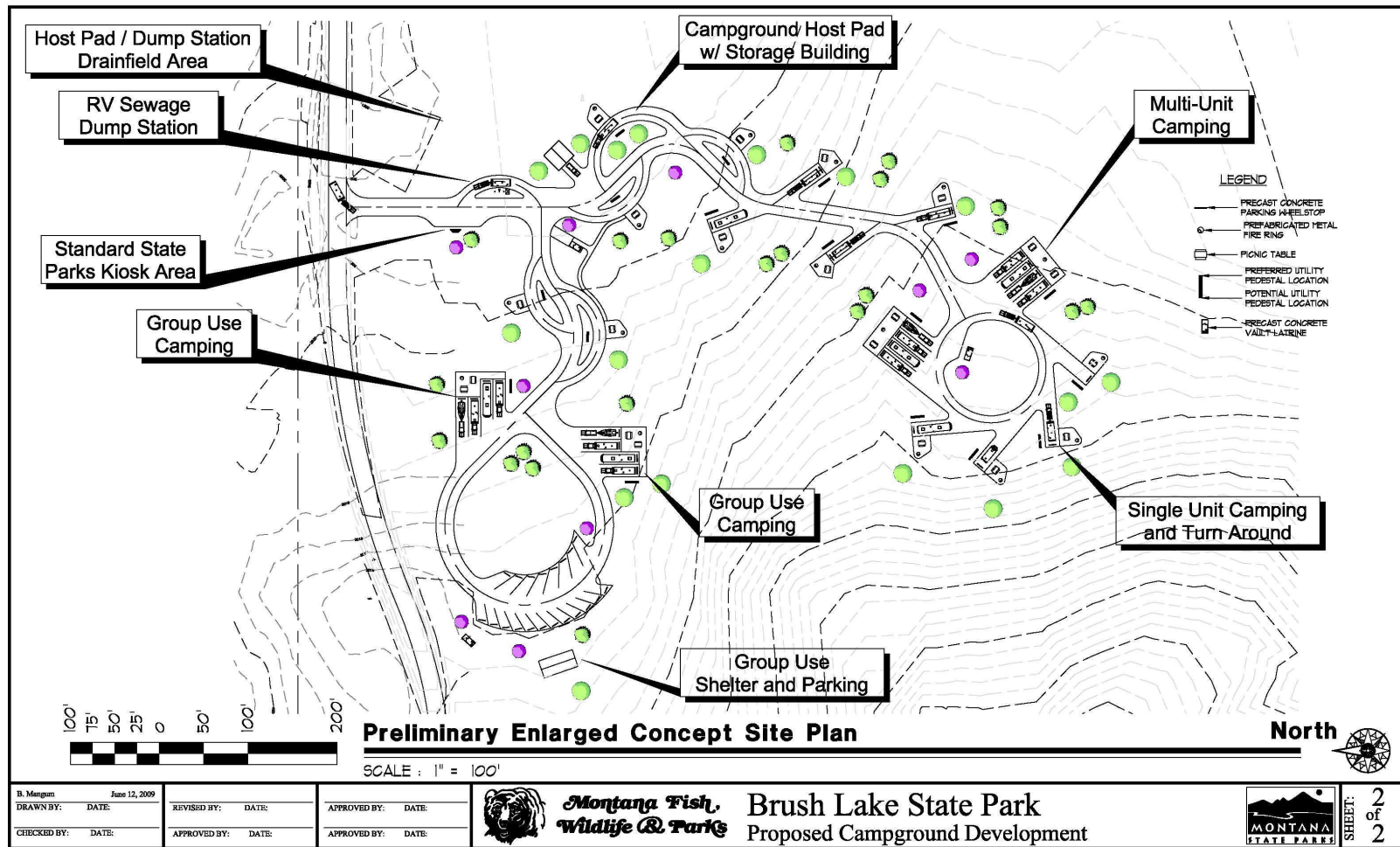
B – Montana Department of Commerce Tourism Report

C – Montana HB495 Checklist

## Appendix A

### Brush Lake State Park Site Map and Preliminary Campground Plan





## Appendix B

### Montana Department of Commerce Tourism Report MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT (MEPA) & MCA 23-1-110

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks has initiated the review process as mandated by MCA 23-1-110 and the Montana Environmental Policy Act in its consideration of the project described below. As part of the review process, input and comments are being solicited. Please complete the project name and project description portions and submit this form to:

Carol Crockett, Visitor Services Manager  
Montana Office of Tourism-Department of Commerce  
301 S. Park Ave.  
Helena, MT 59601

**Project Name:** Brush Lake State Park Campground Development

**Project Description:** Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) proposed to develop a campground and complimentary facilities at Brush Lake State Park. The improvements will include: designated camping sites/pads, electrical hook-ups, pre-cast concrete vault latrines, gravel interior road, group use pavilion/shelter, RV dump station, campground host pad, picnic tables & fire rings, and directional & regulatory signing. Currently the park is only open for day-use activities such as picnicking, hiking, swimming, and boating.

Brush Lake State Park is in the northeast corner of the state 8 miles from the state line with North Dakota in Sheridan County. The park is approximately 31 road miles southeast of Plentywood, MT, and 5 miles east of Dagmar, MT.

1. Would this site development project have an impact on the tourism economy?  
NO YES If YES, briefly describe:

Yes, as described, the project has the potential to positively impact the tourism and recreation industry economy.

2. Does this impending improvement alter the quality or quantity of recreation/tourism opportunities and settings?  
NO YES If YES, briefly describe:

Yes, as described, the project has the potential to improve the quality and quantity of tourism and recreational opportunities.

Signature Carol Crockett, Visitor Services Manager Date 7/29/09

## Appendix C

### HB495

#### PROJECT QUALIFICATION CHECKLIST

**Date:** September 25, 2009

**Person Reviewing:** Woody Baxter (MFWP)

**Project Location:** Sheridan County, Montana Township 33 North, Range 58 East, Section 22 (NE ¼)

**Description of Proposed Work:** Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) proposes to develop a campground and install other improvements at Brush Lake State Park.

The following checklist is intended to be a guide for determining whether a proposed development or improvement is of enough significance to fall under HB 495 rules. (Please check \_ all that apply and comment as necessary.)

- [ X ] A. New roadway or trail built over undisturbed land?  
Comments: *An interior roadway connecting all individual campsites would be developed. The land in which this proposal would be located is past cultivated land, which was listed as CRP land until September of 2007. Vegetative cover of the site primarily consists of tame grasses, such as smooth brome, created wheatgrass, and rye grass.*
- [ X ] B. New building construction (buildings <100 sf and vault latrines exempt)?  
Comments: *An open three-sided group-use shelter for day-use events is part of this proposal.*
- [ X ] C. Any excavation of 20 c.y. or greater?  
Comments: *Clearing and redistribution of existing topsoil for the construction of the new road and camp spurs would require the excavation of greater than 20 cubic yards.*
- [ X ] D. New parking lots built over undisturbed land or expansion of existing lot that increases parking capacity by 25% or more?  
Comments: *In this proposal, new individual parking areas would developed for overnight camping, and a large parking area would be provided for guests of the group-use shelter.*
- [ ] E. Any new shoreline alteration that exceeds a double wide boat ramp or handicapped fishing station?  
Comments: *No*
- [ ] F. Any new construction into lakes, reservoirs, or streams?  
Comments: *No*
- [ ] G. Any new construction in an area with National Registry quality cultural artifacts (as determined by State Historical Preservation Office)?

Comments: *No, but MFWP's Cultural Heritage Program Manager will monitor the progression of the construction effort to ensure no previously unrecorded sensitive sites are disturbed.*

- [ X ] H. Any new above ground utility lines?  
Comments: *Potentially, the extension of the power line to the park will be above ground. However, the new electrical system to be installed would require all conduits and connections to be underground.*
- [ X ] I. Any increase or decrease in campsites of 25% or more of an existing number of campsites? Comments: *At this time, the state park has no designated campsites so the site improvements will increase the number of existing campsites available.*
- [ X ] J. Proposed project significantly changes the existing features or use pattern; including effects of a series of individual projects?  
Comments: *This proposal would change the use patterns of Brush Lake State Park from a designated "Day-Use Only" recreation area to an area that also provides overnight camping opportunities.*

If any of the above are checked, HB 495 rules apply to this proposed work and should be documented on the MEPA/HB495 CHECKLIST. Refer to MEPA/HB495 Cross Reference Summary for further assistance.